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The Background of the Relations Between Japan and the United States

By HON. ROLAND S. MORRIS

American Ambassador to Japan

I AM not going to discuss any of those questions which may at the present time be the subject of friendly discussion between our Government and the Government of Japan. All will appreciate the convention incident to my present representative capacity, and which makes it inadvisable for me to discuss any subjects which are being discussed between our governments. And yet, I do want to say just one word. I had occasion just before I left for Japan to quote the words uttered by Viscount Ishii when he arrived in San Francisco on his special mission. He then said that from his experience of the diplomatic relations of the Japanese Government he was confident that there were no questions between the United States and Japan which, if approached in a spirit of fair-mindedness, candor and generosity, were not susceptible of a perfectly just settlement.

And that is the reason that through these days when the interest of our people has been concentrated quite considerably on the questions of our relations with the Japanese Government and people, I have sincerely regretted the ill-considered statements which appear in both countries from time to time, suggesting that we may have serious difficulties or even conflict with Japan.

I concur entirely in what the Premier of Japan, Mr. Hara, said only the other day, that war between the United States and Japan is simply

unthinkable; but I do, having said that much, I do, as I say, value this opportunity just to speak about what I have called the background of relations between the United States and Japan. First, I want to speak very briefly about our historical associations, because we can not understand the background of relations between peoples unless we recall to our minds some of the historical associations which are connected with those relations.

It is the habit, in discussing this subject, to refer generally to the service which was rendered at the time that Commodore Perry first opened the ports of Japan and brought Japan into contact with the Western life and Western civilization after a long period of seclusion. Of course, that was a dramatic episode in 1853, followed as it was by his first treaty, granting certain limited privileges to vessels under the American flag that desired to take refuge or to trade in the ports of the Japanese Empire. But perhaps not unnaturally the real basis and foundation of our relations which were laid by our first consul and minister resident to the Japanese Empire have been more or less hidden by the intervening half a century since his labors were performed. I wish that the American people knew more than they do today about the extraordinary, romantic and successful career of Townsend Harris, who went to Japan as the result of one of the provisions of the Perry Treaty, which allowed the Government to

send there a consul who, it was provided, should reside at the little port of Shimoda on the Peninsula of Idzu, across the mountains from the capital of the Empire.

The man whom the President of the United States then chose for that task had been a merchant of the old New York type. For many years he had attended to his business earnestly, had gone to his club of an evening, and taught, as they all did inevitably in those days, his Sunday-school class on Sunday, and who probably thought that he was destined, like the merchants of his time to be buried in Trinity churchyard, opposite Wall Street, where so many men who have lived the same kind of life in New York found a resting-place. By curious chance, however, he decided, late in life, when he was approaching fifty years of age, to abandon this regular life and go out to the Far East to study Far Eastern conditions. It was there he was found by our Government, and requested, first, to negotiate a treaty with Siam, and then proceed to take his position as consul at Shimoda.

There is something very romantic about his arrival there, when he was left by a man-of-war on this Peninsula, the only foreigner at that moment, excepting the interpreter, Mr. Heusken, in that far world—cut off from his own country and the outside world—entrusted with the task of persuading the Japanese Government and the people that they ought to enter into closer international relations not only with the United States but with the other countries which were at that time knocking at their door for recognition.

They wanted him to go home, begged him in every way to leave; told him they wanted to go back to their historic seclusion, and not to be annoyed by having to come in contact

with the outside nations. For over fourteen months he remained in Shimoda, trying to persuade them to permit him to go across the great Hakone range of mountains and into the City of Yedo in order to present his credentials to the Emperor of Japan or the Shogun, whom he believed to be the Emperor of Japan at that time, and establish diplomatic relations with the Government.

Many obstacles were placed in his way, but finally by tact, sympathy and diplomacy he won his point and made his triumphal journey to Tokio, marching across the mountains, guarded by a Japanese escort and accompanied by his lone interpreter—probably one of the most remarkable journeys ever made by any representative of our country. He was going through a country which had been shut off from any sight of foreigners for over two centuries and a half. He was practically alone. Thousands, tens of thousands, it was estimated, as he approached the city, were gathered there to view this strange person who was going through to deliver credentials from a foreign potentate.

He entered Tokio, and I want you to realize this fact, only sixty-three years ago this November, and there are many men—some of them who have risen to prominent places in the Government of Japan—who can recall the excitement occasioned by his entry into the city, men who are still living and active.

It is hard, is it not, for us to realize that this history of the relationship covers only a period of a little over half a century? When he entered Yedo, or Tokio, as they call it now, he was going through as the first representative who had ever come from a foreign country since the time the ports of Japan were closed back in the

early part of the seventeenth century.

Mr. Harris found a very unusual and unexpected situation. Forces which had been gathering within the Empire of Japan for over a century before his arrival, forces of a newer learning and broader outlook, forces of a greater desire to come in contact with the world at large—suppressed and held down—were beginning to assert themselves.

It was not the opening of the ports by Perry or the presence of Townsend Harris, the American representative, that made the new Japan. That was in the making for centuries before they came. It simply was the act that concentrated these forces so that they might assert themselves, and which resulted in the civil war which took place a few years later, and gave to these forces the control of the destiny of this great nation. When he came there he did not realize the seriousness of that struggle, or how closely it impended; how much it meant to the nation. He was bewildered by the strange surroundings and atmosphere and conventions. He found a perfectly contented and highly organized civilization and government. He tried, with shrewd common sense, with a generous heartedness, with large sympathies, to break through this unfamiliar veil which concealed the real purposes and meanings of the people with whom he was dealing, and tried to get at the heart of the problem; and yet he was often, as he tells in his Journal, utterly baffled by it.

But he struggled on. Plainly, his diary is a record of faith and sincerity which is an inspiration to any man who has any task of that character, in the study of another people,—telling us in that diary how he struggled on, disappointed, seemingly misled, not making progress in his associations, but believing if he were frank, if he were

sincere, and if he were generous in his sympathies, if he made allowances and tried to understand, that in due course he would be able to understand.

And the man whom the Japanese representatives had begged to leave their country, after he had been there for a period of six years, was the same man that they begged even harder that he might remain, because, they told him, "Your interest and your sympathy has made you understand as no foreigner can understand." Their disappointment was keen when he went home. We in the United States have forgotten about that representative who labored there alone, but there is hardly a Japanese man or Japanese child that can not tell you of the history and of the achievement of Townsend Harris, and what he meant to their people.

Now, I can give you many illustrations from that historical period but I do not have the time. I want to choose one illustration which will show you the difficulties of his problems and the way he approached them. After he had negotiated our first treaty—our first large treaty that succeeded the Perry Treaty—he found a tremendous reaction among the Japanese people against the prospect of any closer contact with foreigners. There was a period of dissension, a period of approaching civil war. His own life was threatened. The representatives of other countries, who had been gathering there in the years succeeding his visit, became alarmed. They said that the moment had arrived when some form of intervention or of joint action would have to be taken in order to protect foreign interests that had established themselves in the Japanese Empire. And then, in that critical moment when intervention might have taken place and the whole history of Japan might

have been changed, the faithful, devoted friend and interpreter who had acted for Townsend Harris during the years of his residence, Mr. Heusken, was murdered in the streets of Tokio; and instantly practically every other foreign representative left the city, and protested that they would no longer stay within the confines of that Empire away from the guns of their men-of-war. But the one man who had been the most directly attacked, whose own interpreter had been stricken down, stayed in Tokio all alone and said, "I know this does not mean any antagonism of the Japanese people, this act of a single man; and I propose to remain here, get the proper reparations from the Government, and continue to trust the Government that has assured me they will do everything they can under difficult conditions to give me protection." He stayed for some three months, and there are Japanese still who can tell you how they watched this strange foreigner pacing up and down the porches of the Buddhist Temple in which he made his home, watching with patience the developments outside. He remained there until one by one all the other representatives returned. The crisis was over. The Japanese Government made the proper amends for the act of her citizen and intervention was averted.

This splendid exhibition of sympathy, of understanding, of judgment—that was the note, the spirit rather, that ran through the whole conduct of this our first representative to the Japanese people at a most critical time. It was a spirit that was carried on and exemplified by his immediate successor. It formed the basis and the foundation for the attitude of mind which has been taken by our people and our Government toward the wonderful development of the Japanese

nation and people in the last fifty years, a spirit of generous understanding, of real sympathy, and of faith in their intentions and in their purposes and their willingness to coöperate if we can retain and keep that faith.

Later on the diplomatic matters became less important than they had been in Townsend Harris' day, and that was succeeded by the next one of the contacts or associations which the American people have had with the Japanese people as a background for their present relations. Townsend Harris left Tokio in 1862. He went back to find his own country in the throes of a great civil war. Our interests were concentrated on our own problems and our own period of reconstruction that followed. We lost sight, perhaps, of the interest which we had aroused and the sympathies which we had created across the Pacific. Between 1865 and 1866, when we began the completion of our great transcontinental railroads, and the period toward the end of the last century, we were moving forward in that tremendous development of our western territory; we were more or less a people who were centered on ourselves, and the result was that so far as our trade relations were concerned—which would have been the basis of many other relations with the Japanese people—they fell off and amounted to very little. In fact so much so, that during that period some cynic once remarked that Commodore Perry had succeeded in opening the ports of Japan to British trade and American missionaries. But that last phrase is the one that I want to pause on for just a moment. While we were not interested primarily in the development of Japanese trade in those intervening years when we were developing our own country, we were profoundly interested in education and missionary

work which was being carried on by as remarkable a band of men and women as has ever been sent on any mission by our country. I like to think of those splendid statesmen—missionaries, like Verbeck and Davis and Hepburn and Loomis—who went out in the late sixties or early seventies, and became the counsellors and friends of the Japanese people and the Japanese Government officials, and helped them in making these early contacts with Western life after their long period of seclusion.

We hardly realize how much that educational and missionary work has done, because one can never value the effect, or estimate the force of an idea as it permeates into the body of the civilization of a people. They established a university. They established contacts. They guided the early students who came in such numbers to the United States. They formed that bond which has continued to exist between our two peoples, that bond of education in which thousands of Japanese young men have come over to study our institutions, to live in the atmosphere of our life, and go back there to live in the political, commercial and other interests of their country.

One can hardly comprehend, in the study of the Japanese problem, the vast sympathy and affection that has been created in the Japanese people by the unselfish effort of the hundreds of men who have gone out there and educated those people through the past half a century. We must keep that as part of the background of any questions or problems that may arise between our two peoples.

Now I want to say, finally, as another element, something about the growth of our trade relations, because these too are forming now, even more than at any other time, another great

bond of interest and of exchange between the two nations.

In the early days, as some of you will recall, we had a large, hopeful and growing trade of the clipper ships across the Pacific engaged in the China trade primarily; and we had great hopes at the time that those ships, with their famous skippers, going out from the New England coast, into the Far East, and coming back laden with the materials they had gathered there, would be the basis of a great trade of our country with the Orient. One of the reasons our Government saw fit to send Commodore Perry to get better privileges at the ports of Japan, was for the protection of that early China trade. These ships often had long passages to make, often ran out of fresh water and other necessities, and were unable because of the seclusion of the Japanese to enter port and gain succor and supplies. That is one reason the effort was made to bring this secluded nation within the community of nations; but it is one of the ironies of history that, while Townsend Harris was negotiating the details of the second treaty that was to provide this very thing, we were engaged in a war at home which was to result in sweeping the American merchant marine from the sea for a long period of time. So that, at the conclusion of that war, much that had been gained was of no avail because our ships were no longer on the high seas sailing under the American flag.

So it was for this reason that our shipping industry failed. Because of this failure and because of our concentration of interests within our own border and the development of our own country after the Civil War, very little progress was made in our trade relations with the Orient. In recent years, however, as Japan's needs have grown, as our capacity for production

has developed, and as we too have been reaching out to find foreign markets, we are beginning to build up a trade which was beyond all the conceptions of those who first thought of the possibilities of friendly trade relations with the people of the Far East.

Here are some figures to show how in the last three years alone that trade has developed. We all know the demand that has been made in this country in recent years for various silk products, but I do not believe that we appreciate how much of that silk comes to us as raw silk from the Empire of Japan. In 1917 we imported from Japan raw silk worth \$154,000,000; in 1918, \$173,000,000 and in 1919 we imported raw silk to the enormous total of \$328,000,000.

From that amount, sent to us by Japan, Japan obtains the funds with which she can purchase in our market the cotton needed in her mills in order to supply the market which she is developing in China. Here is the strongest conceivable basis for the closest possible coöperation in the development of a splendid trade on the Pacific between these two countries.

Just a word in regard to the spirit of coöperation which has characterized some of our recent trade efforts in the Orient. The organization of the consortium of which you have read, an effort of the leading nations to join together in solving China's pressing financial problems and assisting in the improvements which the Chinese need, is one of the coöperative efforts. The effort which was made under the leadership of the United States in Japan during the period of the war, and afterward, in the international supervision of the Chinese Eastern Railway in an effort to hold open that trade route

into Siberia and Russia is another evidence of that general international and trade coöperation. It is along those lines that lies our greatest hope, and the greatest possibility of closer coöperation with the Japanese people; and it is because of this that I turn back again to the spirit that pervaded the negotiations of our first representative, and ask, "Are we not justified in believing that, as in a solution of the questions which he had, he found success by his spirit of generous sympathy, understanding and real earnestness of purpose and firmness, so may we not, studying the various problems which may arise between these growing interests of our two countries, adopt precisely the same spirit and same method and be assured of the same success?"

Just one thing more: The fact that there are problems or questions between nations is in no sense an evidence of unfriendly relations between them; rather it is evidence of the growth and the closeness of their mutual interests. Those are the things that bring these questions up for adjustment. I have tried to show you thus briefly how close those mutual interests have been—historic, educational, commercial—and my one hope is that we as a people, freed from bitterness, from prejudice, from hasty judgment, will study the new questions as they arise, calmly, in a spirit of generosity, confident that if we are sympathetic, are loyal to our own interests but generous in understanding the interests of others, we will find in the Japanese people a response which will show to us anew the faith that they have always had in our unselfish purposes and in our high international ideals.